

HB 1495 -- MISSOURI VETERANS COMMISSION

SPONSOR: Griffith

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass by Consent" by the Standing Committee on Veterans by a vote of 8 to 0. Voted "Do Pass-Consent" by the Standing Committee of Consent and House Procedure by a vote of 8 to 0.

As specified in this bill, the Missouri Veterans Commission must review the provisions of the Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2019, and any regulations related thereto. After review, the Commission, in collaboration with the Department of Mental Health, must provide recommendations and make efforts to adopt procedures, programs, treatment options, additional aid, and any other assistance deemed necessary by the Commission to assist in the efforts to prevent veteran suicide, subject to appropriation. On or before July 1, 2025, and by every July 1st thereafter the Commission must file a report with the Department of Public Safety and the General Assembly on the recommendations, implementation, and effectiveness of the efforts by the Commission to prevent veteran suicide.

This bill is similar to HB 132 (2023) and HB 2455 (2022)

PROPOSERS: Supporters say that suicide is a public health crisis in the United States. In Missouri, the suicide rate has grown even faster. Data shows veterans commit suicide at a higher rate than civilians. We need to find solutions to this growing problem and this bill is a step in the right direction.

Testifying in person for the bill were Representative Griffith; Jason Howe, K9s On The Front Line; and Arnie C.Dienoff.

OPPOSERS: There was no opposition voiced to the committee.

OTHERS: Others testifying on the bill say there are a variety of factors that increase suicide risk including mental health issues, losing a sense of purpose and belonging, substance use disorders, issues with finances, relationships, and legal issues. Several of these factors also put veterans at a higher risk for homelessness and incarceration. The VA has studied programs that decrease suicide risk by increasing access to mental health care services. There are also programs implemented by states that seek to reduce suicide risk by educating the public and professionals on suicide risk, placing extra protections on veterans, and increasing veterans' access to mental health services.

Testifying in person on the bill were Sarah Anderson, Most Policy Initiative; and Paul Kirchhoff, Missouri Veterans Commission.

Written testimony has been submitted for this bill. The full written testimony and witnesses testifying online can be found under Testimony on the bill page on the House website.